The Interspecies Newsletter

Spring 1993

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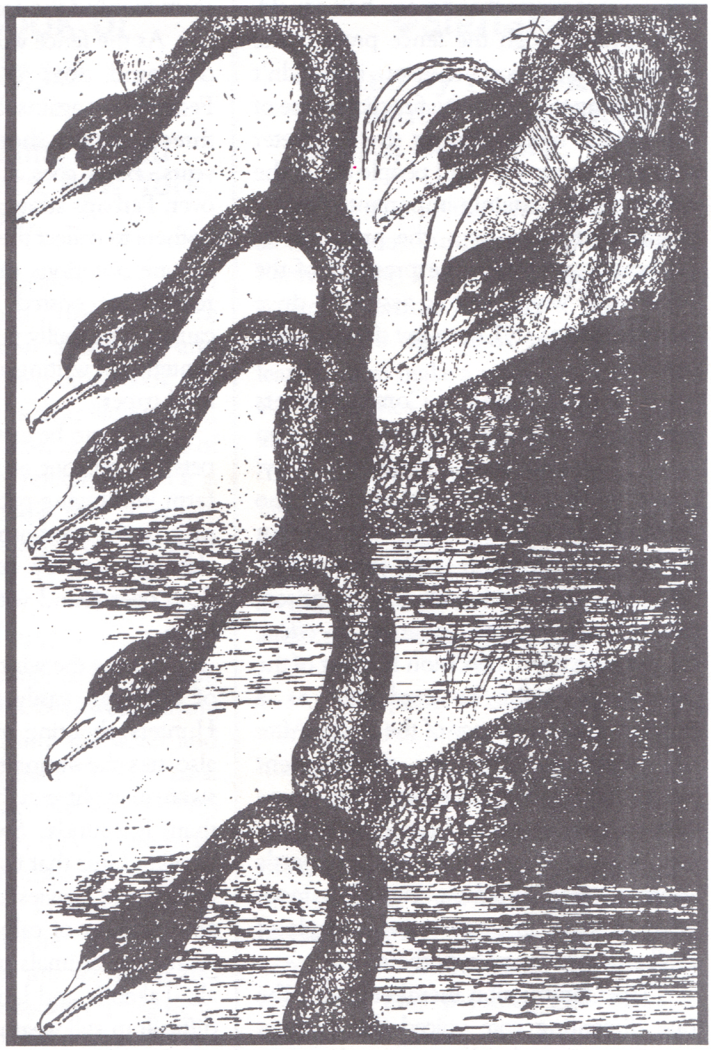
# The Swan Song

*I have never tried to communicate with swans. No matter. A relationship with an animal, a bird, an entire species, often gets expressed best when we simply take a stand for protection. The piece that follows—originally published in a local newspaper—is about such a stand. It is more mundane than most that appears in this journal. There are no frozen oceans, no exotic whales, no aesthetic theorizing, no eccentric communication devices. Interspecies Communication Inc. is depicted here as something different: a champion of local bravado. Occasionally, this too needs to be shared. Let us all rejoice in the wild-life of home.*

*Getting involved in a local land issue woke me up to nature in a way that even polar bears never could. The trumpeter swans called to me without ever making a sound. That I heard them at all still surprises me.*

–JN



In *Meandering Rivers and Square Tomatoes*, Milenko Matanovic asks a question about the language of real estate: "why are new housing developments named for what they have destroyed? Do you see any oaks at the *Oak Grove Condominiums*; any eagles at *Eagles nest*? In fact the names are tombstones, not the living reality."

Out here on San Juan Island we have the Trumpeter Inn located on Trumpeter Way. So far, these two place names have escaped the onus of Matanovic's rule. Driving down the Valley Road on just about any day between November and March, one is apt to observe the dazzling spectacle of up to a dozen trumpeter swans cavorting in the adjacent wetlands with their long necks stuck deep into the water rooting out a winter's meal.

A forty acre, six lot housing project was recently proposed for the land adjacent to Trumpeter Way. However, the developers seemed well aware of both the swans and their habitat, via the restrictions imposed by wetlands legislation adopted by the State of Washington. The developers even went before the local Planning Commission, applying to construct a four foot tall fence topped with barbed wire around the three open sides of the wetland. They also negotiated with the local Preservation Trust to put a conservation easement on the entire parcel. Furthermore, houses on the forty acre site would not be sited within 100 feet of the 13.6 acre wetland. It looked very thoughtful on paper.

But if we follow Matanovic's rule, all did not bode well for the swans. The developer's had made one mistake. They chose to call their development, Swan Valley.

Things fall apart. During the initial hearing before the advisory County Planning Commission in Friday Harbor where I live, the County}s own planner in charge of the proposal admitted that in terms of real swan preservation, it would be far better to cluster the homes in a group further away from the wetlands. In his own words, "once the swan's leave, they will not come back." Then the planner went ahead and demonstrated what might kindly be called a preference for property values over swan habitat by recommending approval.

Damaging evidence soon emerged from a wetlands expert representing the Washington Trumpeter Swan Society. Interviewed by the local newspaper, she pointed out that San Juan Island contains the second largest concentration of wintering swans in the state of Washington. Unfortunately, the birds on the island are fast losing ground to development. Whereas 61 birds were counted in 1989, there were only 45 birds in 1991. She brought up a point about swans that no one had considered. Even though the fence protects the habitat from physical incursion, it wouldn't do anything to protect the functional use of that habitat by exceedingly shy trumpeter swans. Keeping dogs and people out of the wetlands was certainly important. But the nearby barking of dogs, the proximity of the houses, and even the presence of the fence itself, would just as assuredly drive away the swans . "I have my doubts", she concluded.

The Planning Commissioners listened to all points of view, and then voted 7-1 in favor of the developers. Why? It was mostly the same old story of who wields power in the town of Friday Harbor where there are more real estate offices than food stores. Nobody was surprised, although many people got angry. In effect, the commissioner's decision in favor of the developers might be explained as a mandate for the efficacy of the fence. After all, everyone voting for development agreed that the protection of the swans was their primary concern. I can only surmise that they believed the swan expert's testimony was somehow invalid; a moot point; perhaps just one more example of shrill environmental hyperbole.

The Commission member casting the lone dissenting vote voiced the concern that the unfenced side was too obvious a glitch. "It does not make sense to fence a wetland if you are going to leave 600 feet unfenced."

## Behavior

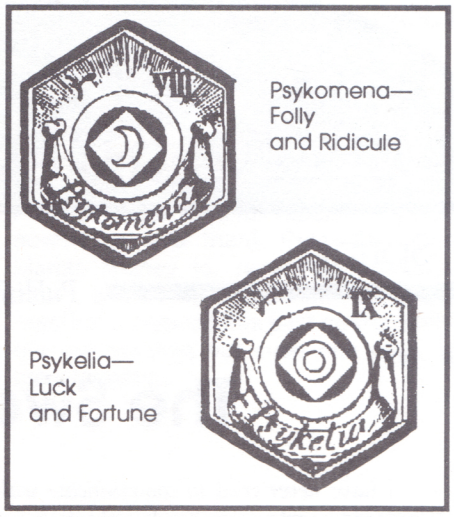
The wetlands strung out along the top of San Juan Valley are ideal swan habitat. During the winter, the prevailing wind blows off the Strait of de Fuca, and aids the birds anytime they need to get airborne. The maritime temperature remains relatively clement, and the wetland sumps provide a diet of water roots. The wetlands are surrounded by open pastures with occasional large farms set on knolls and outcroppings off in the distance. It's a typical pastoral setting in the grand style, and one reason why some locals consider the valley to be the most scenic view on an island full of scenic views. Cows graze adjacent to the wetlands. The swans don't seem to mind the cows.

As the fence would remind us, swans do mind dogs and hunters. Despite Federal laws against hunting swans, at least three have been shot here over the past few years. Bang goes a gun, a swan slumps over. Perhaps strangely, the poacher rarely bothers to collect the target he's just killed. In one notorious case, a thousand dollar reward got posted. A local teenager got caught. The guilty party ended up with the sentence of writing a public apology in the local paper.

Dogs can be just as bad. Gentle family pets get put out at night and sometimes form into roving packs. Their best known prey are the newborn lambs of early spring, although nobody keeps count of all the dead deer found with their bellies ripped open.

During the winter, the nearby barking of dogs can easily get the swans flying. Hunters shooting away at nearby ducks also sets the swans to flight. But setting a swan to flight can be a bit more serious than it sounds. Swans are among the heaviest birds that fly. The trumpeter is the biggest and heaviest of its race. A considerable amount of calories are necessary for such large animals to become airborne at all. Takeoffs and landings are particularly difficult in still weather. An animal that expends such a great amount of energy to get into the air does not choose to do so during the winter months when food is scarce. If the temperature drops suddenly, a flying swan may end up freezing to death. Some authorities believe that the trumpeters also undergo a change in metabolism after they arrive at their winter habitat. Their entire body slows down, placing the animals at even more risk if forced to take to the air.

It thus seems the height of ecological irony that stiff waterfowl laws have been




enacted to constrain hunters from shooting at swans, although the swans still end up dead from hunter's bullets. Another common cause of death among swans is the ingestion of too much lead shot.

It is for all these reasons that swans tend to congregate in the very same areas all winter long, and year after year. It also explains why swans rarely linger at any longterm habitat that has suddenly been altered by new objects like fences. They simply can't afford to risk losing precious calories.

The Trumpeter Swan Society promotes an integrated legal designation that unequivocally connects swans to swan habitat. It seems an obvious solution. Keep the few extant swan habitats free of hunting and other exploitive forms of human intervention and the swans will thrive. But this is obviously a red flag waving in the face of hunters, which explains why this common sense approach has never been ratified into law.

Human trespass on swan habitat is by no means a recent phenomenon. Trumpeters once ranged across all of North America. The pioneers viewed them as a source of meat and feathers; and even Audubon, himself, preferred swan quills for his detail work. Swan stocks vanished successively from the eastern U.S., the Mississippi Valley, and the Prairies. By the beginning of the 20th century trumpeters were close to extinction everywhere outside of Alaska.

At that point, the swans started receiving the protection they needed. They slowly came back from two nesting pairs in

Yellowstone back in 1919, to 400 animals in the same area by 1960. Along with this recovery, also came a change in their endangered status.

Most swan experts agree that the trumpeter swan still faces an uncertain future. Stocks have dropped at least 20% over the past several years. This loss is clearly tied the recent dramatic destruction of wetlands by dam-building ranchers and farmers on the Northern Prairie. As human beings throughout the West fight to control their own diminishing water supply, they inevitably dam more and more prairie wetlands. The swans have no place else to go.

## Politics

The Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) guidelines were written to provide local governments with guidelines for insuring the protection of the environment in decisions pertaining to growth. In the case of the Swan Valley long plat, both the developer's fence and 100 foot setback are the direct result of SEPA recommendations. The two have proven effective at protecting many species of ducks around the State. But as we have already learned, trumpeter swans are more fragile than ducks.

Like so much wildlife legislation, SEPA's effectiveness lies primarily in its interpretation. This raises several thorny questions. Remember the swan expert testifying that the fence and the setback would probably protect that skin-deep section of real estate designated as wetlands, but it would scare away the swans. That is another way of saying that the map is not the territory. But if it isn't, must wildlife managers consider the behavior of each plant or animal species that inhabits an environment when drafting regulations? Must lawmakers legislate to the worst case scenario of the most fragile species present? In the course of researching this article, every single person within the State and Federal bureaucracy to whom I posed this question admitted to wrestling with the issue on a daily basis. They all answered: "sometimes yes, and sometimes no."

Which leads to a second related question. What if, hypothetically, there are ten swan habitats on San Juan island. One plot gets developed because no one bothers to speak up for the swans. Then another gets developed. And another. Is there some point where a central policing agency steps in, because some specific number (4 wetlands? 6 wetlands?) have been destroyed over a designated period of years. In other words, can society draw the line? One lone soul within the US Wildlife Service answered "there is no central eco-police force and it's a problem as development accelerates." Local governments remain the primary interpreters of SEPA. Out here on San Juan Island, Locals are very insistent that their elected officials deal with ecological issues as one aspect of the one-at-a-time real estate packages being submitted to them.

This island I call home has a limited economy . Dealing real estate is one of the few ways of getting rich. That fact causes property rights issues to reside at the heart of every local politician's platform. If anything, the threat of outside policing was the main force igniting San Juan County's recent passionate uprising against the State's Growth Management Act. As the GMA relates directly to the protection of wetlands, The original plan would have made cluster housing mandatory. Cluster housing was one of the first things dropped from the local rewrite of the GMA.

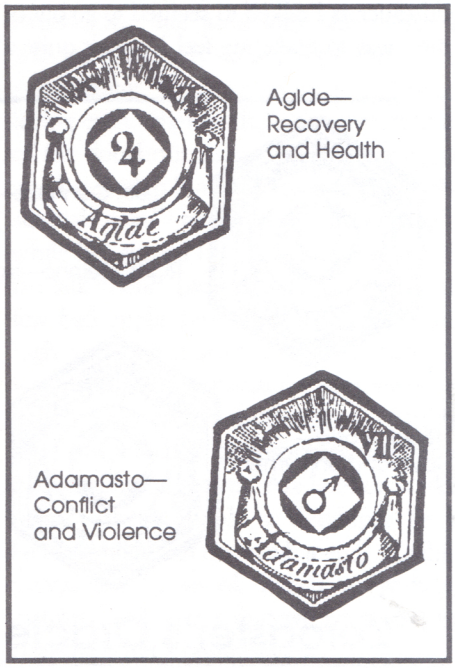
The heat generated by property rights advocates fighting restrictions can get ferocious. It often takes the form of those with money spending money to control due process. For instance, when developers follow all the rules they expect to get their permits. When they don't get them, especially for some reason that falls through the cracks of the legal process (like the caloric needs of swans), developers often end up suing governmental decision-makers. Bureaucrats soon learn to live in healthy respect of such revenue-draining maneuvers.

Remember the local planner who voiced opposition to Swan Valley, but then approved the plan anyway? In effect, he chose an ineffective guideline over what he knew about swans, and thus avoided a potential lawsuit against the San Juan County Planning Commission. The Planning Department thus chose to protect its ass despite several other legal but "risky" alternatives that, regretfully, would have allowed the developer to build his houses while protecting the swans at the same time. In the planner's own words, "we could only encourage the developer to build cluster housing. He chose not to follow our recommendation. As long as his development met the permit requirements, we were legally bound to pass it." But if that's the case, one must ask how long can any government afford to utilize a wholly ineffective guideline as the legal basis for protecting bureaucrats' decisions?

## Getting Involved

I am not a neutral journalist documenting somebody else's issue. I drive past that wetlands every day on my way into the town of Friday Harbor. When I read the account of the planning commissioner's proceedings in the local newspaper, I just about cried.

My reaction was typical. First I got mad and then I got cynical. I was convinced that the developers would save themselves a lot of trouble and a lot of fencing money by simply going out onto that wetlands next November, and scaring the birds away for good. I believed such an



action would ultimately be doing the swans a favor. At least that way they wouldn't fall prey to either dogs or green-grass herbicide poisoning in the years to come.

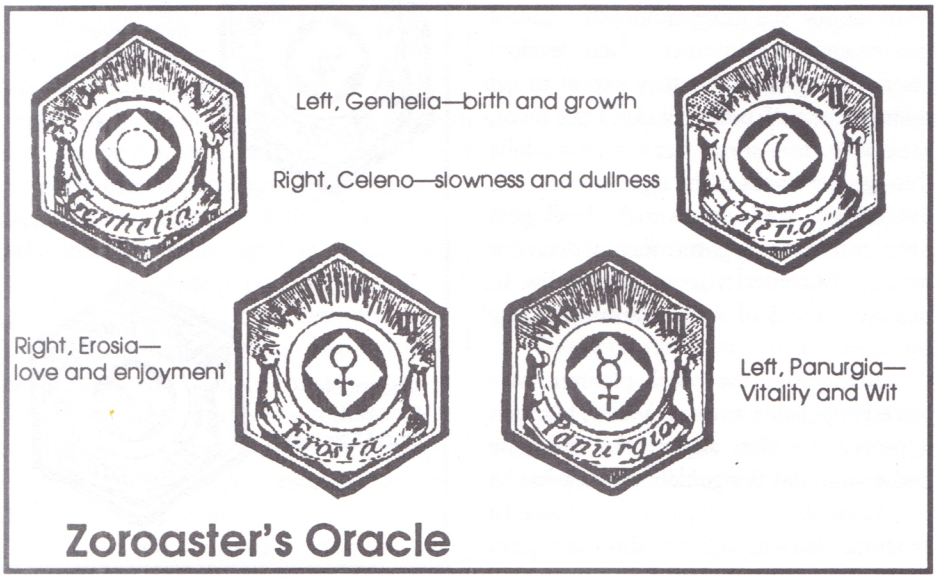
I believe there are too many people like me who derive too much smug satisfaction sitting in armchairs analysing the horrendous problems of the **system**, without ever attempting to change it. If more of us got involved—even to the extent of taking the time to vote a little more thoughtfully—we would eventually transform the current inequitable situation where the majority of wildlife advocates are unfunded volunteers and the majority of development advocates are well-staffed lawyers making $150 an hour. Wildlife everywhere pleads with us to do away with the good old boy network of politicians, do away with wildlife managers who believe they are appeasing society by drafting puny wildlife regulations. Call it government by idiocracy.

With sentiments like that in tow, it was an easy next step get involved.

Unfortunately, back in the real world, when a citizen finally decides to follow the path of advocacy, he or she often finds it transmuting into an odyssey of too many phone calls to too many bureaucrats who want to send them somewhere else. I got involved, insisting at every step along the way to retain a healthy respect for my own naivete. For instance, remember the hypothetical eco-police. Some of the bureaucrats I talked to seemed to go out of their way to make me feel I wasn't quite a grown up when I asked if there was anyone anywhere in government who could actually do the job, right now, of protecting swans. One woman assumed a comforting, motherly tone with me before dropping this bomb: "You want to protect swans? That's why people start environmental groups, isn't it?"

I also admit to having my paranoia tested by the entire process. I've since learned that some level of anxiety is fairly common among wildlife advocates who happen to live in small communities. Who wants to get a reputation for being a local troublemaker when money and jobs are at stake? Many people here in San Juan County feel—as surely as they feel about God and country—that it is patently unethical for one person to tell another what he can or can not do on his own land. A good *American* just doesn't do it, even if every swan in existence loses its habitat as a result. I knew I didn't stand much of a chance of breaking down that long standing taboo. I decided my advocacy would be *for* swans and not *against* the development community. Fat chance.

Another fear of mine, possibly unique to this particular issue, arose when I realized that the lawyer who so often represents the local developers, also happens to be the local judge. To my mind it seemed an insidious conflict of interest—and another wild card in the developer's hand. I found myself coping by paying extra attention to driving well below the posted speed limit.




## Swan Ambassador

The system can indeed be harsh, autocratic, paradoxical, and dinosaur-like. On the other hand, the majority of the people working within the wildlife bureaucracy, at both the State and federal level, proved to be both helpful and supportive of this citizen advocate making the extra effort to speak out in favor of swans. But one seasoned wildlife volunteer believed the empathy I received had everything to do with the specifics of the issue. "If everybody likes swans its because there are no jobs at stake. No one is hunting them. You learn to be on your guard when a wildlife issue affects a major industry or the military. More often than not it's an uphill battle just to get the government agencies to enforce the laws that are already on the books."

The swans were worth any trouble. I got my fuel from a deep-seated feeling that growth on this island is out of control. Life in these parts often feels like a game of Monopoly where the developers have hotels on all the yellow, all the green and all the blue, and I own a house down here on Mediterranean Ave. And even though there's a critical water shortage, and even though you can't ever find a parking place in Friday Harbor, let alone plan a trip to the mainland that doesn't include two hours or more waiting in a ferry line, the town still passed a hundred forty-four new housing units just in the month of April 1991 alone. Those kinds of figures fueled me to start writing letters and making more phone calls. Significantly, by the twentieth call, I had stated and restated the case so many times, that it had condensed itself into a veritable press release:

*No one, including the development community, wants the swans to disappear from San Juan Island. Everyone would rather our children see swans in Swan Valley in ten years rather than a bunch of ten year old houses and a rotting fence. Listen to the experts, they have cast serious doubt on the current plan. The developer has other alternatives. Get him to choose one and let's all be done with it.*

Whereas my rhetoric started out sounding like a line drawn in the dirt by an Earthfirster, the final statement seemed

utterly mild by comparison. It soon got the attention it deserved from some powerful wildlife officials at both the State and Federal level. Official letters were soon sent off to the County Commissioners reiterating my points. I felt like an ambassador to the swans. I even started to believe that we (the swans and I) were going to win this one. Actually, my own toned down rhetoric seemed so logical, and yet so downright democratic and eminently friendly in its intent, that I decided it was time to appeal directly to the developer.

## Development

The Seattle Times recently carried a front page story about the greedy image that the general public has of land developers. More and more citizens believe that too many developers are trashing Puget Sound by building too many oversized projects in inappropriate locations so that available resources no longer fit the community.

As everywhere else, the local developers here on San Juan Island don't feel they're getting a fair shake. Everybody needs a house, needs to go shopping at stores, visits doctors in clinics, goes to work in offices, vacations in hotels. But no one respects the people who take the considerable risks to build those edifices. If Rodney Dangerfield's "I get no respect" character had a profession, you just know he would have to be a real estate developer.

That Times article also verified my suspicion that, like everything else, it's just a few nearsighted developers who ruin it for all the rest of them. The result is that *all* developers get pegged as generic eco-villains who engage in activities detrimental to the scale of a community only for personal profit–in a word, being greedy–and then turn around and demand the rest of us love them for *solving* the problems of growth.

Here in San Juan County, a few developers have ruined it for the rest of them by occasionally favoring the blatantly unprincipled practice of SLAPP lawsuits. SLAPP stands for "Strategic Lawsuit Against Public Particpation" a strategy that forces advocates and entire neighborhoods to hire expensive lawyers just to counter what are usually nonexistent legal grievances while their real sin is caring about the size and shape of the community we all call home.

A local example seems in order. Every major land decision in San Juan county has a legally-designated public appeal period during which citizens get to express their views on what the planning department has just approved. Two years ago a developer received a forest use permit to clearcut 35 acres of land as a prelude to building a housing development on the parcel. A woman appealed the decision, pointing out the obvious fact that the man wouldn't actually be able to develop the land until he had secured yet another permit. Why give permission to destroy a forest irrevocably when nowhere did it read they would later be guaranteed the house-building permit? The appeal caused the Planning Department to rescind the permit. Enter SLAPP. The developers sued both the planning department and the woman who wrote the letter. Fortunately for all sides, the suit was dropped before it got to court.

In fact, SLAPP lawsuits display the worst side of the legal profession. It's too often the environment or rural neighborhoods that suffer the most from such practices. Perhaps luckily, it causes the entire development community to wear egg on their face for some time afterwards.

A recent hour spent with one of the developers of Swan Valley at a local doughnut shop proved to be the least satisfying experience of my entire swan Odyssey. I had hoped that the two of us would eventually be able to arrive at a common high ground based on our mutual bottom line of swan protection. Why else would he be building his expensive swan-frightening fence? He'd just gotten insufficient information about swan behavior, right? He'd proceed more conservatively, wouldn't he, now that so much expert doubt had been cast upon the efficacy of his fence?

I was never able to learn what he felt in his heart about protecting swans. Instead, he answered every version of that same question by reaffirming that his plat was "a quality development" that went "far beyond the minimum" to protect swans. When I asked about clustering the houses into one or two areas with the rest left as common ground, he countered by asserting he'd never "condominianize" his development and "would you want to live in cluster housing if you had the choice."

"No" I answered, "But I wouldn't buy into the original design either."

My most illuminating line of questioning revolved around what he would do if the County actually demanded cluster housing. He said he might comply, but then again, he might just as easily "be forced to forgo the permit process entirely and (smiling) open up the wetlands as a private duck-hunting club." It was an annoying answer, suggesting that, at least in his own mind, the people trying to protect swans would be held personally accountable for what he, himself, might "be forced to do" to his wetlands. I later learned he'd used the same threat on both the County planner and the Swan expert.

Perhaps sadly, there was to be no common ground. I could see that land development was this man's life work–his blank canvas–and as such, he radiated the self-image of a successful and individualist businessman right in step with solving the "real problems of growth" while turning a tidy profit at the same time.

Quite honestly, I could never appreciate the finer points of his game. Even our language was at variance. He defined the site as a *long plat*, while I referred to the very same piece of earth as a *swan habitat*. There we sat for over an hour facing each other in the quiet atmosphere of the doughnut shop; I sipped my decaf and listened to him talk about taking "substantial risks" to build "quality units", while he sipped his decaf and listened to me talk about "swan metabolism" and the few bad apple developers who utilize the high price of hiring a lawyer as the strategic weapon of choice against the opposition.

I thought about shifting gears. Possibly asking a blatantly philosophical question like: is progress growth? Are bulldozers like paintbrushes? Should a developer be a land steward? But no, to what end?. Civility prevailed. We shook hands in parting, assuring each other that we were glad to hear the other's point of view.

## And the Winner is...

Lucky for the swans, the Planning Commission is not always the end of the development process. In San Juan County the Board of County Commissioners sometimes gets to make the final decision. The three member Board for San Juan County met in June 1991 to hear arguments for and against the Swan Valley Long Plat.

The commissioners listened to all points of view and then voted unanimously *against* the developer's proposed design. In a rare gesture, they even overruled the findings of their own Planning Commission by pushing the property lines a hundred and fifty feet further back from the wetlands. That single alteration alone would almost surely force the developers back to the drawing board. And for the first time in San Juan County, strict covenants were added against certain herbicide and pesticide use. Construction would only be allowed between May and October when the swan's are gone. Lastly, the commissioners designated a budget, funded in part by the developer, to study the effects of development and hunting on the swan habitat in San Juan County.

This decision would also set a precedent for all wetlands in San Juan County at least for the near future. It meant that swans now dictate real estate practices and even land values throughout the county.

It sometimes seems that a quarter of the San Juan Islands get covered with fresh water during a wet winter. The swans seem capable of turning up just about anywhere if you look long enough. Some local swan-watchers are concerned about the risk that inevitably escorts such power. Everybody's read about loggers killing spotted owls—stringing them up like posters—to make a self-defeating political statement about the demise of logging communities. Swans make larger targets than spotted owls. And who can be certain how a person is going to react when told he can't build his proposed million dollar development because a bunch of swans occasionally stake out the same claim?

It's too bad we need to focus on the swans at all. Isn't it actually the longterm relationship between human beings and the land being decided here? When do we stop blaming the conservation of the land on the animals who reside there?

## Linkage

Two winters have passed since the commissioner's decision. If anything, local resentment against the GMA has increased. In a state where liberal pro-environmental candidates won every important State job in the election of 1992, two property rights candidates with strong ties to the real estate establishment squeeked out victories here in San Juan County. The State's potential to support conservation seems in place. That is one reason that wildlife advocates out here in San Juan County are currently building bridges to the capitol in Olympia. They are preparing to bypass the local decision-making process whenever necessary.

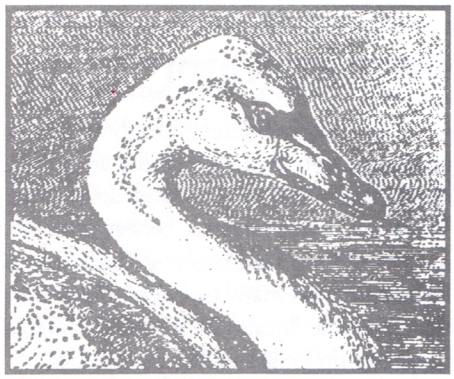
And a fence has long since gone up around the Swan Valley wetlands. As I write, none of the lots has a house built on it, although there they are, listed in the local newspaper each week. The market is sluggish. But they get sold one by one.

So far, neither the fence nor the name *Swan Valley* has altered swan behavior. But who can predict what will happen when the real estate listing called *Swan Valley* develops an acoustic asoect: the sound of hammers hitting nails? What happens later on when pasture turns into gardens.

One day a few short months ago I counted thirty swans on that wetlands. It was more than I'd ever seen there. I'm also seeing them in new habitats. One nearby neighbor dug a pond two summer's ago. This year the first swans overwintered there. It is a good sign. Then again, the bird counters tell us there are less swans on the island this year than last year. And less last year than the year before.

The decrease in swans causes me to ponder what some writers call "a sense of place." The term describes a certain respectful way people and communities inhabit the land. We care for the ecosystem we live in because it is home: the land's own extension of ourselves. This sense of place should help us develop a land ethic to guide our decisions concerning this relationship—so we don't ever forget that vulnerable habitats and vulnerable species are inextricably linked. As it is, habitats ands species both deserve better than we give them now. No matter for any single decision, human beings continue to decide their future based on the primacy of real estate profits. We deserve better. Future generations deserve better.

—Jim Nollman, March 1993



## Publishing

❧ This piece about swans first appeared, in a different form, in the January 1992 issue of Animal's Agenda magazine, 456 Monroes Turnpike, Monroes CT, 06468.

❧ In much the same form that it appears here, the same piece has also appeared in the premier issue of the Island's Independent, Langley WA.

❧ The story about the mountain lion attack which appeared in the summer, 1992 newsletter, will soon appear in a much refined form in any upcoming issue of NewAge magazine, 342 Western Ave, Brighton , MA 02135.

❧ The story "Why Wash Birds", which appeared in the Winter 1992, Interspecies newsletter, later appeared in the Autumn 1992 issue of Orion Magazine, 136 E 64th St, NYNY, 10021.

❧ "Why Wash Birds" will soon be published in the May 1993 issue of Utne Reader, 1624 Harmon Pl #330, Minneapolis, MN 55403.

❧ "The Wild Heart", which first appeared in the Winter 1993 newsletter, will be also be published in the next issue of The Cultivator Journal, RFD 2, Box 330, Brooks, ME, 04921

# Book Reviews

## ❖Whale Nation❖

### by Heathcote Williams, Jonathan Cape Publishers, London, 1988

If any book I own would be worth a fortune in five hundred years, this first edition, signed by the author, is the one. I am certain this book has a US publisher.

This is an epic poem; a penetrating critique of the whale's inscrutable vitality, and a parable of the whale nation's tragic demise at the hands of human beings. Were the photographs of this book presented with no words, it would still be among the most powerful of whale books. With Williams poem, the book achieves a depth equal to *Moby Dick* and *Mind in the Waters*.

...A siren's song,
Leading sailors to believe,
As the sounds infiltrated through the wooden hull,
That their vessels were haunted
by spirits of the deep.
Webs of elegant cetacean music stretch around the globe;
Lyrical litanies on the bio-radio
That draw on an oral tradition of submarine songs
From a living memory bank, founded fifty million years ago.
...Fifty million year old sagas of continuous whale mind:
Accounts of the forces of nature;
The minutiae of a shared consciousness;
Whale dreams; The accumulated knowledge of the past;
Rumours of ancestors, the Archaeoceti,
With life-spans of two and three hundred years.

## ❖The Book of Whales❖

### by Richard Ellis, Alfred Knopf Publishers, new York, 1980.

I am a whale researcher, and this book has always been my main reference for locating information about any and every species of whale. No other book can touch it for scope, for its clear illustrations, for its literate condensation of thousands of scientific and anecdotal references. Yet it is also the kind of book that a whale aficionado might curl up with on the couch and read like a novel.

...In September 1957 a live beaked whale came close to shore at Oiso Beach, near Tokyo, where some boys were playing ball. The boys waded into the water and killed the whale with their baseball bats. When Nishiwaki and Kamiya (1958) examined the specimen, they realized that its measurements and proportions did not agree with those of any known species of *Mesoplodon*, and therefore "ventured to settle a new species for this specimen and nominated it as *Mesoplodon ginkgodens*. This species name is chosen from the fact that the lateral view of the teeth of the present specimen resembles closely the shape of the leaf of the ginkgo tree (*Ginkgo biloba* Linneaus)."

...The beluga is probably the noisiest of all cetaceans. Early whalers actually called them "sea canaries." Scammon, who could hear them only from the surface, claimed they made a noise like the "faint lowing of an ox," and other referred to the various sounds of the beluga as bird calls, mooing, deep sighing and gnashing of teeth, grunting of pigs, badly played musical glasses, and the noise produced by vigorously shaking a large tin tray (Fish and Mowbray 1962). According to Tomilin (1957), the Russians "in the north" have a proverbial expression for one who is making too much noise: "screaming like a Beluga."

## ❖Signal❖

### edited by Kevin Kelly, published by Harmony Books, New York, 1988.

This may be the least well-known of all the various incarnations of the Whole Earth Catalog. The subtitle explains it best: **communication tools for the information age.** Look to this book to learn how to make a newsletter or to learn about theories of language, from visual knowledge to digital thinking, from Body communication, to networking societies. Like every other Whole Earth Catalog, this one is the product of a community of reviewers. It offers incisive critiques, and an imaginative sky-is-the-limit overview of a subject prone to techno-pigeonholing.

...Interspecies Communication Inc. was founded to promote relations between humans and animals the way civic groups promote relations between sister cities—with meetings between representatives, full of warm smiles and good intentions. IC's newsletter reports on these meetings, which have recently involved U.S., Soviet, and cetacean musicians in one case, and psychics and orcas in another.

You can't call this pseudoscience though; IC doesn't claim that this is any science at all. The idea, rather, is to interact with other species in whatever way—scientific, artistic, shamanistic—seems most appropriate to the situation. This is certainly a broader definition of "communication" than most researchers would accept. But the approach does give the animals a greater opportunity to shape the exchange to their liking than a purely scientific approach would allow.